

**HOW WOULD THE USE OF 360-DEGREE FEEDBACK
AFFECT EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE IN A VALUES-
BASED COMMUNITY POLICING ENVIRONMENT BY
THE YEAR 2004?**

JOURNAL ARTICLE

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This Command College Independent Study Project is a FUTURES study of a particular emerging issue in law enforcement. Its purpose is NOT to predict the future but rather to project a number of possible scenarios for strategic planning consideration.

Defining the future differs from analyzing the past because the future has not yet happened. In this project, useful alternatives have been formulated systematically so that the planner can respond to a range of possible future environments.

Managing the future means influencing the future--creating it, constraining it, adapting to it. A futures study points the way.

The views and conclusions expressed in the Command College project are those of the author and are not necessarily those of the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST).

Introduction

In 1997, the California Peace Officers' Association (CPOA) sponsored the development and ongoing presentation of a Leadership Development Course. The course is designed to introduce officers to supervision and leadership issues experienced by sergeants. During the first two course offerings, approximately fifty officers from CPOA Region VII (San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, and Ventura Counties) were questioned about the performance appraisal processes at their departments. There was unanimous agreement that significant changes are needed because the expectations and requirements of the job have changed so much in just the last few years.¹ While these were informal surveys, the uniformly negative responses underscore concerns about the ability of law enforcement to match organizational performance assessment to community expectations. If current appraisal systems are not accurate or effective, it is especially critical to examine the problem and relate possible solutions to the future of law enforcement. A recent research project suggested that adding an element of 360° feedback to performance appraisals may provide a key to more effective law enforcement performance.² Another project submitted to the FBI National Academy by Captain Bruce Barsi of the Millbrae, California Police Department pointed out that, "...it is essential that the performance appraisal system reflect the goals set by the agency for community policing."³ Both projects offer models for agencies desiring to change their performance evaluation processes to meet the needs of the future. This article examines the concept of including the use of 360° feedback in employee development and evaluation processes, so that they become a better reflection of a community-based policing philosophy.

360° Feedback (Multi-Source Assessment)

As the words suggest, 360° feedback, or multi-source assessment, is a process of receiving performance information from multiple raters within a person's circle of influence. Typically, the process is established to solicit input from supervisors, peers, subordinates, and even customers. Experts on 360° feedback argue about whether the feedback survey results should remain confidential and be used only for professional development, or if they should also be incorporated into the organization's performance evaluation process.⁴ Multi-source assessment can be used effectively either way, and it is up to each organization to determine how the process is implemented. Whether or not that information is actually used for purposes of formal performance evaluation, the resulting professional development of an employee would presumably be reflected in performance evaluations. When the element of 360° feedback is introduced, a more balanced picture emerges. Not only does multi-source input simply provide more information, it offers insights and perspectives that a single supervisor may not have, even if (s)he consults with other supervisors regarding the performance assessment.

A 360° feedback process works like this: An organization identifies a number of behaviors that contribute significantly to its success and that are observable to others. Employees then rate themselves, and are also rated by peers, subordinates, customers, and supervisors according to how well they model the critical behaviors. Multi-source assessment can be customized to the needs of each organization. In the U.S., more than ninety percent of Fortune 1000 companies use some form of multi-source assessment.⁵ The Arizona Department of Public Safety uses 360° feedback to assess its supervisors

and managers. Other major companies that utilize the process include AT&T, Bank of America, Federal Express Corp., and IBM.⁶

As law enforcement seeks to be recognized for high professional standards, the following reasons for implementing a 360° feedback system are well worth considering:⁷

- Leadership alignment: The 360° feedback program establishes a list of desired behaviors and actions against which individual performance can be evaluated.
- Team building: Identification of commonly agreed upon team leadership behaviors that, when performed well by each member, result in successful team performance.
- Promotion and succession planning: 360° feedback can help employees develop their weaker areas into strengths.
- Shared responsibility: 360° feedback can foster shared responsibility for an organization's success. It clarifies roles and performance expectations and more clearly connect them to overall business objectives.

What is the Philosophy of Community-Based Policing?

Ed Barlow, Jr., president of Creating the Future, Inc., recently made the point that creating and supporting the lifestyle choices of our communities is really our business. Enforcement of laws is only one aspect of that responsibility. We must continually match the services we provide with community expectations. We must rebuild and rethink the role of the law enforcement officer in the community. Changing the image of an officer's role may attract excellent people to the occupation who would not consider it at the present time. We must show the public that law enforcement has more value than they can presently see.⁸ This way of thinking about the relationship between a law enforcement organization and the community it serves is the root of the community-based policing philosophy.

In the words of one community policing expert, Community Oriented Policing requires that the law enforcement agency has an organizational culture which reflects the following:⁶

- A policing agency is a service organization with its primary function being to provide public safety related services that meet the needs and/or desires of the community;
- The policing agency views itself as an integral part of the community;
- The policing agency has formed a true partnership with the community's various stakeholders in order to provide a better quality of life for those who live, work, and/or visit the community; and
- The policing agency's organizational operations are strategy-based – anticipating and solving problems before they erupt into major issues – as opposed to the traditional command and control style, which is simply based upon reacting to and confronting individual incidents.

Community-based policing can only be successful with the adoption of an organizational philosophy that is quite different from traditional high-control, legalistic policing styles. It requires a willingness to form true partnerships with the community – in ways that are not typically considered to be the role of a police officer – to identify problems and risks and develop lasting solutions. A successful transition to a community-based policing philosophy requires a change in the culture of the organization. The leadership challenge is to create organizations that fulfill their traditional law enforcement roles and, at the same time, make solid connections with the people in the communities they serve.

The 360° Feedback / Community-Based Policing Connection

How do law enforcement agencies evaluate whether or not they are doing the right things for their communities? In 1992, seventy California municipal law enforcement agencies were surveyed, and fifty-six of them identified themselves as community-based policing agencies. Seventy-three percent of those departments expressed their service-oriented

philosophy in their mission or values statements. Seventy-three percent also said that performance expectations for officers changed with the adoption of that philosophy. Seventy-five percent of the departments listed unique skills and abilities required to implement the philosophy. Of the fifty-six community-based policing agencies, only nine percent made any changes in their methods of evaluating officer performance, and only eleven percent allowed for any citizen input into the evaluation process.¹⁰ In a similar study in 1998, thirteen California municipal police agencies were surveyed. All but one identified themselves as community-based policing agencies. Only fifty-four percent said that the community-based policing philosophy is expressed in their mission or values statements. Forty-six percent of the agencies had made changes reflective of that philosophy in their performance evaluation processes, and thirty-one percent allowed community input.¹¹

While some improvement can be seen in the results of the second study over the first, it reflects slow progress over the intervening six year period in matching stated organizational philosophies to performance expectations. In his 1992 study, the author looked 10 years into the future (3 years from now) and predicted that officers would no longer be evaluated based primarily on factors that indicate the law enforcement response to crime. "Quantitative data such as the number of arrests made, citations issued, or calls for service handled will be de-emphasized as performance measurements, in favor of qualitative performance assessments that support Community Policing."¹² This vision of the future does not appear to be developing as rapidly as he predicted. Law enforcement needs to shake some of the mire of tradition from its feet and pick up the pace, but it is still headed in the right direction.

A great deal of research indicates that people do not evaluate themselves accurately, at least not in terms of the way they are viewed by others.¹³ There is a normal human tendency to withhold negative information from people when talking to them about themselves. In fact, this is one criticism commonly heard about the accuracy of supervisor-only evaluations. Additionally, there is the tendency for a subject to rationalize negative information when it is provided. Many people are not open to new ideas about themselves, or they have a “crystallized view of themselves and interpret others’ behaviors and reactions as consistent with that self-view.”¹⁴ Research also shows that feedback can cause people to modify their self-evaluations.

The perception of many California law enforcement agencies is they are doing a fine job for their respective communities based upon statistical information related to arrests, citations, and the crime rate. It is clear from the data presented previously that organizations are not relying heavily upon feedback from the community and other sources to determine their effectiveness. Developing 360° feedback processes for individual performance assessment and development can provide an avenue for seeking new levels of openness and learning, both inside and outside the organization.

Focusing on the Future

The project research that resulted in this article included the creation of future scenarios relative to the issue of how the use of 360° feedback would affect employee performance in a values-based community policing environment by the year 2004. To facilitate that, “brainstorming” was done using a Nominal Group Technique (NGT). The NGT panel was composed of individuals with broad professional experience. The panel consisted of an environmental planner/city council member; a construction

contractor/police sergeant; a personnel analyst; a public school administrator; a technology business owner/police detective; a community development employee; a municipal parks and recreation department director; and a police lieutenant who is also assigned as a neighborhoods/police liaison. Trends and events that would impact the issue were identified and prioritized by the NGT panel, and their cross-impacts on each other were examined. Based upon that information, worst case, best case, and most likely scenarios for the future were created. The most likely scenario envisions law enforcement agencies recognizing the inadequacy of current performance development and evaluation systems and basing them on job competencies that are more consistent with community-based policing philosophies. Employees will find multi-source assessment to be extremely useful for their professional development, but the feedback will likely not be widely used directly in the formal performance evaluation process.

Strategic Planning

Author Phillip Blackerby defines strategic planning as “a continuous and systematic process where people make decisions about intended future outcomes, how outcomes are to be accomplished, and how success is measured and evaluated.”¹⁵ To begin the process of defining the future, strategic planning consultant Tom Esensten recommends defining the current business definition for the organization; and making external, internal, and stakeholder assessments relative to the organization.¹⁶

Current Business Definition

As previously established, community-based policing is about creating and supporting the lifestyle choices of individual communities.¹⁷ It has become common for departments to create their own mission and/or values statements. Organizations that

espouse community-based policing concepts should clearly identify their values and how they relate to their service environment. It should be evident to anyone who reads the statement that the agency strives to accomplish its mission through community collaboration.

External Assessment

Using a “STEEP” model, one can identify factors (Social, Technological, Environmental, Economic, and Political) that will effect forecasting the future of the issue. Trends and events identified by the Nominal Group Technique panel provide information to be considered during external assessment.

Internal Assessment

If an organization is considering **adding** 360° feedback to its employee development and/or evaluation system to enhance performance in a values-based community policing environment, the agency must first be certain that its basic evaluation process is in alignment with the values-based policing philosophy. Ideally, when a department makes a decision to modernize its evaluation system, it will simultaneously consider incorporating multi-source assessment. Some agencies may feel that their performance appraisal processes are essentially up-to-date, but want to determine how they will fit with a process of multi-source assessment.

A survey of current performance appraisal processes is also a useful tool in assessing the internal environment as to readiness for change. In *360° Feedback: The Powerful New Model for Employee Assessment and Performance Improvement*, the authors offer an instrument that can be used to rate the current system on a ten point

scale.¹⁸ This evaluation survey can also be used later to test satisfaction with new performance appraisal systems.

Stakeholder Identification and Analysis

The importance of “stakeholder” identification and consultation was initially addressed early in this research, with the selection of Nominal Group Technique panel members. Recognition was given to the fact that diverse perspectives on an issue are critical to its successful implementation. Stakeholders in this case are those individuals or groups who would **be impacted** by the implementation of 360° feedback in an organization, those who would **have an impact** on the implementation, and those who simply have a legitimate interest in the issue.

Implementation Plan

When 360° feedback surveys are developed for an individual organization, they should be based upon competencies particular to that agency. Therefore, for the multi-source assessment program to be effective, it is critical that a community-based policing department clearly identify competencies that are aligned with its values-based philosophy. Agencies considering 360° feedback implementation should first develop and/or update their employee evaluation procedures to ensure that they are complementary and consistent with organizational values. Only after this is accomplished should the agency move to Phase One of multi-source assessment implementation. Research for this article identified the following phases leading to implementation of a 360° feedback process:

- *Phase One – Readiness Assessment for 360° Feedback*
- *Phase Two – Establish How 360° Feedback Will be Used*
- *Phase Three – Generate Enthusiasm Among Stakeholders*
- *Phase Four – Developing a Competency-Based Survey Instrument*

- *Phase Five – Implement the 360° Feedback Process*
- *Phase Six – Process Evaluation*

Managing the Transition

Transition management should not be viewed as a process entirely separate from strategic planning. In fact, the two must occur simultaneously for a transition to be successful. In strategic planning, the stakeholders were identified who would be affected by the implementation of a system of 360° feedback. Some of those same stakeholders play very significant roles in the transition process. Communicating large amounts of information to the stakeholders is important to generate enthusiasm for the issue, as indicated in the strategic planning discussion. The key to generating enthusiasm, and the key to building commitment for the transition, is honest and continuous communication.

Conclusion

Developing a formal process of 360° feedback is not a simple undertaking. A law enforcement agency that subscribes to a community-based policing philosophy must first be certain that the performance of its employees is being evaluated according to values and competencies that are in alignment with that philosophy. In many cases, that will require completely redesigning the performance appraisal process. That is no small task, and only then should the development of a multi-source assessment process begin. Many departments will not see the need to initiate such a project. Mike Kramer recognized this, as well as the need to act, when he said the following in an article he wrote for *The Police Chief*:¹⁹

Police agencies are notoriously conservative bureaucracies that have great resistance to change. The future of policing, however, requires that change be accepted and even initiated by progressive police agencies. New dimensions and responsibilities will be undertaken by law enforcement as the concepts of community policing and problem-

oriented policing gain prominence...Performance evaluations will be part of the internal change, as well.

Multi-source assessment can greatly enhance employee performance in a values-based community policing environment. James Kouzes and Barry Posner explain why:²⁰

Studies show that people's motivation to improve their productivity on a task increases only when they have a challenging goal and receive feedback on their progress. ...goals without feedback...have little effect on motivation. With detailed feedback...people can become self-corrective and can more easily understand their interconnectedness with the big picture. With feedback, they can also determine what help they need from others and who might be able to benefit from their assistance.

Clearly, the future success of California law enforcement requires that its leadership challenge employees to maximize productivity and service in partnership with our communities. Implementation of formal 360° feedback processes will provide organizations with a valuable tool to help organizations rise to the challenge.

Endnotes

- ¹ James H. English, facilitator, "CPOA Leadership Development Course", interview by Daniel Blanke (summer 1998)
- ² John DeRohan, Bob Leppert, and Dave Livingston, "Future Methods of Evaluating Patrol Officer Performance in a Changing Community Policing Environment by the Year 2003", CA Commission on POST Command College (July 1998): 20-22
- ³ Bruce Barsi, "Suburbia Police Department: Performance Appraisal and Recognition Program", FBI National Academy Session 191 (November 20, 1997)
- ⁴ David A. Waldman and Leanne E. Atwater, *The Power of 360° Feedback: How to Leverage Performance Evaluations for Top Productivity*, (Houston, Gulf Publishing Co., 1998), 40-43
- ⁵ Roland Nagel, "The 360-Degree Feedback Avalanche" [article on-line] (International Personnel Management Association News International, January 1998, accessed 6 February 1999), <http://www.ipma-hr.org/global/360au.html>, p. 2 of 3
- ⁶ Waldman and Atwater, 3-4
- ⁷ Kathleen Finigan, "Feedback Program Helps Strengthen Employees' Skills", [article on-line] (Capitol District Business Review, July 13, 1998, accessed 6 February 1999), <http://www.amcity.com/albany/stories/1998/07/13/smallb3.html?h=Finigan>, p. 1 of 2
- ⁸ Edward D. Barlow, Jr., "Scanning, Forecasting, and Nominal Group Practice", (lecture presented to CA Commission on POST Command College Class 27, San Marcos, CA, 25 March 1998)
- ⁹ Rick TerBorch, Chief of Arroyo Grande, CA Police Department, "Community Oriented Policing Revisited", (presentation to League of California Cities Annual Conference, Long Beach, CA, 1998)
- ¹⁰ Scott M. Jordan, "Developing Officer Performance Evaluation Systems in Community Policing Agencies by the Year 2002", CA Commission on POST Command College (June 1992): 13-14
- ¹¹ DeRohan, Leppert, and Livingston: 7
- ¹² Jordan: 62
- ¹³ Waldman and Atwater, 6

¹⁴ Walter W. Tornow, Manuel London, and CCL Associates, *Maximizing the Value of 360° Feedback*, (San Francisco, Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998), 21

¹⁵ Phillip Blackerby, "Overview of Strategic Planning" [article on-line] (Performance Strategies, Inc., 1997, accessed 2 March 1999),
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¹⁶ Tom Esensten, "Strategic Planning", (lecture presented to CA Command College Class 27, San Marcos, CA, 25-27 January 1999)

¹⁷ Edward D. Barlow, Jr., "Scanning, Forecasting, and Nominal Group Practice", (lecture presented to CA Commission on POST Command College Class 27, San Marcos, CA, 25 March 1998)

¹⁸ Mark R. Edwards and Ann J. Ewan, *360° Feedback: The Powerful New Model for Employee Assessment and Performance Improvement*, (New York, AMACOM, 1996), 75

¹⁹ Mike Kramer, Effective Law Enforcement Performance Evaluations, *The Police Chief* (November 1995), 32

²⁰ James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *Credibility*, (San Francisco, Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1993), 172-173

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